



"Is this a bus service between villages we're running?"

Candlelight Inn

BY VALMA CLARK

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY HAMILTON FYFE

A LITTLE lady with a man-sized suitcase gave us the road and a wistful glance, for which Bill gave her, in return, a fugitive view of a Denton straight eight masquerading under the mud of forty-seven States, a glimpse, if she was spry enough to read it, of his rear placard, "Torpedo McGowan, All-Capital Speed Run," and a taste of his dust. "Lady wanted a lift?" I protested.

"Hell—is this a bus service between villages we're running?"

"Bill," says I, "you're lacking in chivalry."

"Rudy," says he, "I'm lacking in time. If we're to reach Augusta, Maine, which is a hundred and seventy-two miles from here, in three hours and shake hands with the reception committee that's waiting up for us, we've got to keep hitting it."

"Do we eat?" I sighed.

"At Augusta."

"Bill, this speed fever is getting you; you're missing a lot in your life, Bill——"

"Dinners?" he scoffs.

"Love," says I seriously, "and the finer things."

"Love! I know about love— Hang on! Gosh! That sounded like a spring——"

"It felt like a rib," I groaned. "You know about Blondie Dillon and a few other little gold-diggers. You ought to meet Molly, Bill; and there's other girls in this old world like Molly—girls as fresh and as uncalculating as morning strawberries."

"Show 'em to me!" spat Bill.

His profile—what was visible of it below goggles—was just a grim skirmisher for coverin' the road ahead: blue eyes squinted, bony nose lifted, and level mouth set to the charge on the advancing miles. Bill's face has the double hardness of uncompromising youth and Scotch framework. Even the brick-red of his skin was a baked-in-the-grain coloring, hard, somehow; while the pair of deep, vertical furrows in his lean cheeks, dug into the tough skin like ruts in a hard clay road, didn't soften the effect.

Bill was on the last lap of his latest

spectacular run, in which the stunt was to touch the capital cities of each of the forty-eight States in the briefest possible running time. He had set out to beat Cannonball Baker's 1918 record of eighty-three days at the wheel, and had succeeded, too; having only a few more hours to go, he would slice three days and some hours off that old record. But with the victory cinched, did Bill let up? Not he! Just from pure speedmania, he had driven the last forty-four hours straight without sleep. There was no reason at all why he shouldn't stop and get a night's rest and dash into Augusta in the morning, since the miles didn't count, anyhow; instead of which, he had wired the company at Concord, N. H., which we had just left, that he would reach Augusta, Me., not later than ten-thirty this same August evening.

I'd better explain that I was a mere passenger. I'd met Bill at Hartford in the morning, and was doing this final stretch with him for "auld lang syne." In the old days Bill and I had made some two-man relay records together, but, being a family man now, I'd given up the racing business and was selling cars. As a matter of fact, I had the agency for this same stock car that Bill was putting through its paces; further, this particular advertisin' dodge was my own idea—I'd suggested it and recommended Bill to the company.

Bill's qualifications for almost any racing job were first-rate. At twenty-eight "Torpedo (Bill) McGowan, meteor of the motor world," was known to every speedway in the country; he had made thirty-four transcontinental runs; he had covered these United States, at record paces, from San Diego to New York and from Chicago to El Paso. He gathered medals and loving-cups, and checks from automobile-makers, and a repertoire of cussing words from every State in the Union, and impressions of quick lunches varying from *chile con carne* in Texas to bean hole beans in Maine. He developed a sixth sense for motorcycle cops—developed, also, a technic toward the cops, his method being to take full advantage of that clause of the law which states that you have to catch a speeder in the act, but, once caught, simply to post the amount of

hail demanded to cover appearance in court and then to drive on at the same clip as before. Talk about hard-boiled and veteran mile-eaters! All those exaggerated, serious, and humorous articles in magazines labelled "Forgotten Fireside," "On the Road to Elsewhere," "Pike's Peak, Lizzie, or Bust," etc., fall short of the obsession that was Bill's. Bill's was the speeding spirit of '26, intensified, and exalted to the dignity of professionalism. To Bill himself cometlike motion had become so necessary that he couldn't comfortably light a cigarette out of the wind, and he felt exposed without his goggles.

I was reflecting on these characteristics of Bill and how he had no capacity for romance—feeling at once superior to him and irritated by him as a married man does at the immunity of his bachelor friends—when we tumbled right into romance. The twilight had melted into a warm, safe, cherishing kind of darkness, and only Bill's powerful headlights sweeping the dirt road before us spoiled the illusion that we were all little human canaries, being covered over by a big, kind hand for the night. "Those lights," I gumbles to Bill, "are too bright to be legal." And at that instant, as though the lights were sensitive to criticism, the road blew out on us, and we were doing a mile a minute in a totally black void. Naturally, it didn't last long. I closed my eyes, and said "Amen" to my life, felt the swerve, the gritting of brakes, the curiously soft brush of our impact with something through all my extra pounds of flesh.

I opened my eyes to the ominous and significant sensation of smothering. But I was wrong; I was still this side of that hotter place. Having extricated ourselves from the underbrush, we found that fortunately we were merely half-way through someone's straw stack in a soft-dirt field. We were undamaged, and the car, under Bill's flash-light, was, miraculously, also undamaged. Bill swore in all his American dialects. Then he set to work. Now Bill travels fully equipped for trouble; he had extra batteries, and he was a good amateur electrician. But apparently this trouble called for an electrician who had taken his Ph.D. and seen service.

We stepped back to the road. But hav-

ing temporarily left the main highway in the process of cutting Portsmouth and some miles off our route, we found that night traffic on this lesser road was nil. Even houses seemed to be missing along here. So it was almost startling when, tramping around a curve, we came abruptly upon one of those fine old Colonial farmhouses, built in an L, and all lit up as though for a party. Even the windows held lighted candles, like it was Christmas Eve and they were put there to guide the Christ child on his way. But the strangest thing of all was the absolute silence of the house—a quiet as deep as the quiet of this peace-enchanted land—deeper, and with a peculiar hushed quality of its own.

"What the hell—?" breathes Bill. "If it's Big Doings," says I, "the guests haven't come yet." We were both speaking in tones suitable for church.

But just then Bill discovers the sign; it was one of those hand-tooled affairs, lovingly made, and it read:

CANDLELIGHT INN
BEST FOR TOURISTS. MEALS

Now we were familiar with every form of bait for tourists, from "See Polly and Molly, the Berkshire Bears!" to "Stop! We Serve a Meal in Each Sandwich or Money Back!" This sign had a quiet, modest sound.

"Darn feel spot for an inn," says Bill, "but come on——"

"I'll bet," I yearns, trailing him, "that you'd get one bully farm dinner in this joint."

The brick walk was bordered with marigolds. The whole front yard must have been a riot of nasturtiums by a stronger light, for the smell of them was so vivid that you could tell they were as enthusiastic about just covering ground as Bill was about covering miles. Standing under the fanlight, I shuddered when Bill violated the silence of the house by making the bell peal through it. Nothing happened: just quiet, and the light from all those candles blossoming on the darkness, and the damp, sharp smell of nasturtiums. Bill swore, pealed again. A door shut

somewhere; there came a soft pad-paddling, together with a crisp-running sound, of feet. A chain was dropped, the door was opened a crack. "Tourists?" entreated a light, breathless voice.

"Yes."

"Oh! I didn't hear you—!" The door was flung wide to us.

It was that summer of flowered coats and strike-me-dead purple dresses and zoological ornaments, executed in brilliants, on hats: styles which had invaded even the rural districts and which were perpetrated even by the female children. To meet a lady wearing red roses and green parrots rampant on her coat and a diamond pussy-cat with a humped back on her hat, gave you no shock—no shock at all. But having grown accustomed to a bright and sparkling womanhood, I found I had to look twice to see this pale little sprite of a creature. She wore a pink dress—not French nude or any of those new-fangled shades, but just old-fashioned pink, faded from regular old-fashioned washings; her face had the delicate russet flush of an hydrangea, and her dark hair was long and loose, springing down over her shoulders. But, somehow; these definite mortal characteristics of dress, coloring, hair, didn't anchor her at all. The strongest impression I got of her was that she was as light and slight, as insubstantially and breathlessly imploring of something, as her own voice. She was like a rudderless slip of a sailing dinghy, beseeching your help, yet as committed to the following of her own breezes—breezes which you couldn't even feel, and which might or might not carry her your way—as any wistful, touch-me-not young girl is committed to the following of her own unaccountable moods. She looked to be about fifteen. A dog, a white-and-brown spaniel with great sad brown eyes and sadly hanging brown ears, folded his stump of a tail under him and docilely sat, backing up her entreaty.

The breezes were our way. The girl, with a little gasp, was blown up against Bill and actually caught onto his coat sleeve, while the spaniel hunches up, too, and crowds against Bill's leg. "I'm glad—so glad——!"

"S all right," said Bill, staring; "you

didn't hear us come, because we got hung up in a straw stack. If we can use your 'phone——"

"No 'phone," murmured the girl; "we have no 'phone. There's no telephone near. But if you'll wait—something to eat?" The child's eyes, as clear gray water takes the reflections of trees, held shadows of pain; I had never before seen such confusion of tragedy in any young eyes.

"No time," said Bill. "It's trouble with the lights; we've got to get them fixed and be on to Augusta. Where's the nearest garage?"

"West Hero is the nearest town. Six miles."

"If you've a car of any kind——"

"We—I have no automobile."

"Or a horse?"

"No horse, either."

"But good Lord, how do you get to town yourself?"

"We—I never go to town."

"We?"

"My—my father and I."

"If I can see your father?"

"No! You can't see him—not now——"

"Other cars must pass here; we'll hail one——"

"Besides, it's Sunday night and no garage would be open."

Bill glared at her with the look of giving his horn to a fellow that refused to get over to his own side of the road. "Hellabells," says he, "then we'll drive without lights."

"I'm not yet fixed," says I, "an's I can afford to commit suicide."

"Fried chicken and mashed potatoes," breathes the girl, "beans in butter, golden bantam corn, peach pickles——"

The contrast of big, grim, red-skinned, and dust-caked Bill McGowan frowning down the pitiful but potent little bait of this flower-like youngster like it was a song of the sirens was funny. But suddenly Bill slackened and caught at the door-jamb; forty-four hours of sleeplessness and Heaven knows how many hours of scratched man's were beginning to tell on him.

"We'll have that dinner, all of it! Afterward, we'll talk about Augusta," I pronounced.

"But, Rudy, that reception committee——"

"Hang the reception committee; and remember, Bill, the time when you're not running doesn't add any hours to your record."

"If you like the dinner," insinuated the girl, flickering back to us, "if you find it comfortable and—cheerful—here, you might stay the night; others have sometimes stayed the night."

Bill swore.

I shifted my two hundred pounds onto Bill's right instep and hissed: "In the presence of ladies, you —— blighter!" And becoming suddenly conscious of stiff legs, a tired spine, a back rubbed raw, and a soreness as though my two wing points had punctured my shoulders, I said to her: "We might do just that."

The girl's name was Jessamy Rusk. Mr. Rusk didn't materialize during dinner, but we gathered—not so much from anything definite she said as from her precipitate little evasions and the evidence of his spectacles on the table and his pipe on a chair arm—that her father was temporarily away and would return shortly. We gathered, too, that her father's absence was unusual. That strained something in the kid's manner, even the trouble in her eyes, could be accounted for by her natural nervousness at being left alone after dark.

The child was competent—a feverish little whirlwind in the kitchen. But she wondered whether I would pump her a pail of water and whether Bill would turn the chicken in the skillet while she did all the other things. "There's just you and your father?" asked Bill, kind of daased to find himself with a fork in one hand.

"Yes."

"He's no business to leave you alone, with an inn on your hands."

"He can't h-help!" she gulped; she resented, to the point of sudden tears, Bill's criticism of her father. "Besides, no one comes. I'll tell you a secret," she laughed, and her gaiety was like a fresh bubble she blew which might break any instant; "I lit all the candles on purpose, hoping some one would come. I'm glad you came! If you hadn't come——" She shivered, herded us to the table.

We ate, we praised. Jessamy rushed into a bright little explanation of how everything was grown on their own farm. Even the candles and soap, some of the furniture, the hooked rag with the two black pussies, were home-made. They grew their own broom corn and made their own brooms; her shoes—she stuck out a sandalled foot to show us—were made by—by her father.

"But why?" gasped Bill.

"Because we'd rather depend upon ourselves alone. We're like one of those feudal estates in history, and we have fun, father and I, trying how long we can go without any help from outside."

"History—then you do go to school," Bill scowled.

"No. The nearest school is in West Hero. Father teaches me history; father teaches me everything." The bubble was bright again; from having overcome her reluctance to speak of her father to a critical stranger, she seemed unable to speak enough of him. "Of course some things we have to have from town, but we go always down to Sanford, never to West Hero."

"Why the boycott on West Hero?" asked Bill.

But the lid suddenly closed. They bought nothing from West Hero, though West Hero bought baskets from them. The two Misses Haines, who sold her father's baskets in their gift shop, were the very ones who had—Of course no one else in the world could make such beautiful, strong baskets as her father made. Would we see them?

There were picnic-baskets and flower-baskets, a variety of fine, sturdy, graceful shapes, woven from smooth white maple splints. A wash-tub held more of the splints soaking. "What's this?" asks Bill.

"That one's for a thermos bottle; it's not—finished yet." She turned abruptly from us to the window, examined the outer darkness.

Bill's eyes narrowed on her; he finished the hunk of cake he had carried from the table with a mumbled "Damn good frosting." I noted it because it was unusual for Bill, in his rapid transits over the country, to give attention to anything so trivial as the frosting of a cake.

Jessamy began whiffing out the candles about the room, and Bill joined in. He showed her how to snuff them out with her fingers, and they made a lively game of it. But the lights of a passing automobile, reflected, for a moment, on the mahogany surface of an old cabinet, jerked Bill back to the business at hand. "Heigh, Rudy, halt them! Crêpes, man, why couldn't you have moved? Get out there and flag the next——"

I gave Bill a strong, sensible argument for resting here overnight; Jessamy came in with breathless little pleas. Bill almost bowled me over by admitting that it might be best. "But we'll be on our way," he threatened, "at the first bird-peep!"

Jessamy was incoherent with gratitude to Bill. I was satisfied, too—I'd a kind of hated to leave the kid after her coaxing. Besides, I was downright curious to meet her father; Jessamy, the whole house, was warm with his personality, and it was a pleasant warmth.

The youngster stuck fast to Bill when he went after the car and negotiated it back to the inn, with the flash-light. I smoked a pipeful on the porch, and reflected that the road chair owed its comfortable sag to the weight of my host's body. The notion struck me that the personality of the basket-maker had something to do with the peculiar thrill of quiet that pervaded this house: a quiet with a surface shiver to it, but with a depth of calm, still beauty. Curiously, I lost my impatience to meet the man, and was content just to sit.

Bill and the kid, who now settled on the steps below me, did a running accompaniment to my content. Jessamy, from sitting tautly upright, leaped against Bill, dug a hand into his coat-pocket with a gesture habitual with her father, no doubt; she confided to him her little shiverings of the flesh, her stray thoughts. Bill, for all his hard-boiled bachelor wariness, took her easy, like the kid she clearly was.

"—But if you needed something—and if you c-couldn't go to West Hero for it?"

"My dear child," said Bill blithely, "if I needed postage-stamps or powder for the nose from West Hero, I'd hop right down and buy it. I'd never honor a burg like that with my prejudice."

"You wouldn't if West Hero had talked about your mother until she'd killed herself! Because she was young—so many years younger than father—and because she was so lovely that they were jealous of her, they made up stories about her. Father says the things they told about her were not true—could not have been true. Father said we would not poison our own minds by hating West Hero, but we would stay away from there. He said it was safer for me never to set foot in West Hero. But he—didn't tell me what to do if—" She took up Bill's old cap and pulled it down onto her knees.

"Little burls," rumbled Bill, after a time, "can be the devil."

Silence. The night was an immense purple bowl turned upside down over us, and under it our little activities dwindled. Was Bill, too, soaking in the peace—feeling the futility of miles?

I faded out. For a long time the Jessamy-kid's thistledown voice lifted to me, through an open window, where I lay abed. I heard her final entreaty—"Don't go!"

"Your bedtime, sister."

"Please don't—"

But Bill's "good night" was suddenly hilt, like a period to the wiles of a Blondie Dillon.

Bill himself, by the light of the candle he carried, was too big for the little white bower where he joined me—the kid's room, which she'd given us because it was ready, murmuring something about the down-stairs bedroom for herself. Bill moved about, taking it all in: the white wall-paper with its silver poppy pattern; the white furniture with hand-painted sprays of pink roses; the framed motto of a ship on a navy sea beneath the words "Peace Be Still". . . That room held the whole history of a little girl, from her first small rocking-chair to her first bottle of perfume. It held, too, all the evidences of loving puttering for her comfort and diversion, from the carved wood tassels for handles on the drawers of the dresser to the home-made bookracks and window-pegs.

"She's an odd child, isn't she?" I grunts to Bill. "How do you dope her out?"

"Not odd," snaps Bill; "and she's not

a child—she's eighteen her next birthday."

"Huh? You *do* say!" I stared at him, then I cackled.

Bill whipped about on me: "If you mean to insinuate by that open-exhaust that she's up to any wise-dame tricks, you're wrong!"

"No," I subsided, "I didn't mean that; she's an innocent baby if there ever was one. But that's just it, Bill—when you look at a willowy, high-headed young girl and think what life can do to her!"

"Umph! Guess her father does a pretty thorough job of looking after her."

"Did you meet the old gentleman?"

"No."

"Does it strike you as kind of queer? I mean—My God, Bill! Don't you notice how *still* it is—how even those frogs gurgling away out there don't make any dent on the silence?"

"It strikes me," Bill yawned, "that for nerves you've got a lady in delicate health tied. If you can spare me one of those pillows, Rudy—"

But in spite of the fact that he was two nights shy of sleep, Bill had the same struggle dropping off that I had; his sleep, when it did come, was as troubled as mine. I awoke once to discover that Bill was doing sixty in dreamland with his crushed pillow for a steering-wheel. I awoke again and lay listening to the ticking of a few drops of rain on the tin roof and the singing of a cricket in the room; and when a dog below—probably the spaniel—suddenly let out an awful wail, Bill registered it, too, in shivering rust words.

"Sleep?" I asked him when, at the first cockcrow, he jabbed me and set his feet on the floor.

"Get up—and throttle her down, or you'll wake the house."

"You're not going to see her again?"

"We are not. I settled our bill with her last night."

But, as it turned out, Jessamy couldn't very well be avoided. When Bill opened our bedroom door, there she sat, in the same pink dress she'd worn last night, crumpled up against the wall, with tear-stains on her cheeks and fast asleep. Disturbed, she blinked up at Bill through the moist tangle of dark hair, and vaguely smiled. Abruptly a ripple went over her



"That one's for a thermos bottle; it's not—finished yet."—Page 319.

face, and she began to beseech Bill not to go.

Bill laid a paternal hand on her head, and explained to her how it was he had to be moving on. He swung her up, and she trailed him down the stairs, meeting his questions with fresh entreaties that he stay just for breakfast.

I lingered in the room, considering. Something had gone wrong with the girl's father—but what? The answer was in the back of my own mind, but I hedged from it. I dawdled down the stairs, tripped up short on what my own eyes were witness to. The car was drawn up at the roadside, ready for the forward leap

to Augusta. But Jessamy, with a sharp case-knife in her hands and desperation in her face, was operating upon its tires! Even as I gaped, she stabbed fiercely and the hiss of a punctured fourth tire was added to the expiring breath of the other three.

Bill appeared from the kitchen, a tea-kettle pouring water meant for the radiator upon his shoe as he grasped the calamity. They contemplated each other, and which of their two faces was the sicker-looking would be hard to say.

"Sister," I fumbles, "isn't there some relative handy we could——?"

But Bill ripe into her, his all-American range of epithets and his disillusioned experience of women both concentrated into one stream of pungent bitterness against this youngster.

The kid, like the tires, collapsed. She whirled past us, her eyes wild. "You damned idiot, can't you see——?" I moaned back at him, as I lunged after her.

But the door of the down-stairs bedroom cut her off from my sympathy. My hand on the knob, I blinked my own cowardice with the argument that I never had been a guy to intrude upon people; the absolute lack of any sound in that shut room fascinated me.

Time passed. Wavering between doors, I was conscious that Bill hailed a passing fivver and departed; that he returned in a second fivver, with a garage hand and three spares. Now he was making the tools fly and the mechanic step.

Still procrastinating, I saw that an upright buggy drawn by an upright horse and containing two extremely upright elderly ladies, had pulled up at the side of the road, while the occupants, spelling each other, asked, in voices rising crisper and clearer, for Mr. Jonathan Rusk. Bill gave them a scant shrug of the shoulder. Such lack of gentlemanly attention obviously roused the indignation of the two ladies.

They dismounted, tied their horse, came stepping in a high-handed, spinsterly way up the walk, and inquired of me, with severity, if Mr. Rusk was in. I murmured politely that I believed he was out. They explained to me, growing more and more peremptory, how Jonathan Rusk had promised to send them a fresh

supply of baskets for their gift shop the day before yesterday and had not kept his word; how they had yesterday missed two sales of picnic-hampers, owing to Mr. Rusk's delinquency; how the tourist season was short and they could not afford to miss sales; how they had themselves driven out for the baskets this morning before time to open shop—in short, how they would be pleased to have me remove myself from the doorway and summon Mr. Rusk at once.

I owned that Mr. Rusk had been away for the night.

Their eyes fairly lanced me with questions; from all the prying queries they would have put at once, they chose the most pertinent: Who was I?

Just an overnight guest, I assured them. Jessamy Rusk—was Jessamy at home? Yes.

I was the overnight guest of Jessamy?

Not alone, I flushed; oh no, not alone. My running mate, too——

But at this moment Bill strode up, wiping his hands on his trousers legs, and in the same instant Jessamy tiptoed from the room, closed the door behind her, and stood there looking like a white cosmos that's been stepped on. The two ladies went from Jessamy to Bill, and back to me. The inspection was so definitely unpleasant that even Bill, screwed up as he was to the miles again, gave the spinsters his specific scowling attention.

They shifted the attack to Jessamy: "Where is your father?"

"He—he's not at home."

"When will he be at home?"

"Perhaps," I suggested smoothly, "Miss Jessamy can fix you up with the baskets, in place of her father."

But Jessamy, her face strange, only asked of Bill: "You're not leaving me?"

"Sorry."

"But you can't leave me with them! They are the ones who invented the stories about my mother—the ones father blamed the most for——"

"If *ben*," persisted the arid, clear voice, "do you expect your father to re——?"

"Not ever! He's not coming back ever! Now will you go, and leave me alone?" Jessamy wheeled, and fled; the storm of her sobs was flung out at us from that terribly quiet room.

I knew, before we stepped into the room, what it was we would find. What I didn't understand was the reactions of Jessamy herself: whether she was just terrified and trying to make believe it wasn't so, or whether the concealment was a part of her attempt to hunk onto us, or whether she was merely dazed, instinc-

tuously smiling. I'd seen death before, but never anything to compare with this miracle of gentle peace. The peace engulfed Jessamy's sobs; the only sound now was a whimpering and patter of the toe-nails on the wood floor as the spaniel discovered his mistress.

Bill, his goggles pushed up on his fore-



They contemplated each other, and which of their two faces was the sicker-looking would be hard to say.
—Page 520.

tively clinging to her own, and postponing the moment when he must be taken away from her. What mixture of terror, courage, reticence, numbness, and evasion prompted her to act as she did, I don't know—but then, I've never had much experience in unravelling the kinks of a young girl's mind.

The bed, with Jessamy tumbled down beside it, held the reason for the room's peculiar hush. The man's profile was toward us, so white that the nose was momentarily erased against the pale wall. But as we stood over him, the face was complete again in all its features, complete in its unearthly tranquillity, beautifully complete in the memory of its last

breath, muttered: "He must have been a wonderful old man."

"Heart?" cried one of the spinsters.

Jessamy sobbed.

"Was it his heart?" persisted the other.

"Yes."

"Hm—I thought so—that bluish . . . Did he die in his bed?" (They were the kind who used stock phrases like that.)

"Y-yes."

"When——?"

"Yesterday afternoon, before you came," she said, ignoring them and speaking to Bill, who stood over her.

"But why," the cross-examination continued, "didn't you notify——?"

"Oh, please," entreated Jessamy, "couldn't you make them go 'way?"

Bill was considering the closed eyes, the arm folded so naturally across the still breast—was thinking, with me, that Jessamy must have done this. "You poor—baby," he groaned; "why didn't you tell me—?" He went down on his knees, shifted her complete onto his left shoulder, and held her cradled there in his arms.

"I tried to tell you, but I c-couldn't. I was a-afraid——"

Bill was muttering words against her hair, her cheek, her throat—words that sounded like "honey-bunny, bunny-honey."

The spinsters were gaping. "You came after his death? You stayed——?"

Bill shot them a straight look, and said with a quiet violence: "You two git! Now!"

The ladies departed.

I murmurs to Bill: "I'm staying. I'll wire Molly, and we'll take care of her. You can hop on to Augusta and pick up your bonuses."

"Bonuses?" says Bill vaguely, taking up the kid, and folding himself down on a chair, with all of Jessamy's shivering fright tucked closer to his heart. "I'm staying, Rudy. You get on to Augusta yourself. I lose out, but the car doesn't lose out, see?"

That's how it happened Bill stopped permanently at Candlelight Inn. He lost \$3,500 in bonuses, and he forfeited his victory in the last professional race ever made, but he didn't seem to mind that.

Molly and I dropped in on them one day this spring. The place was as well sign and all, but a new devil's red track was tearing across the nearest hill. "You old son-of-a-gun!" Bill hailed me.

"Meet the missus, Bill," I says, with a certain pride.

Bill went through the proper motions of welcoming admiration and respect. "Meet"—he turns, raises his voice, "Heigh, Jess!"—"meet the missus yourself, Rudy!"

Jessamy came around the house, in a bright pink dress, and pursued by a sheep. She skipped, and the sheep skipped after her, and it gave you a sensation of pure tickled joy in your diaphragm just to see them. She ran laughing up to Bill, and tucked a hand in his overall pocket, and met Molly, and recollected me; there wasn't much doubt about her happiness—it was as sparkling as the spring sunshine that blessed them both.

I says: "I've got a stunt for you, Bill."

He says: "I've got a reputation in the county for covering ground with a tractor that I've got to maintain; no, Rudy, I'm out of the racing game for good."